

PARIS: TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 1884

OSCAR WILDE'S VIEWS

WHAT HE THINKS OF PARIS, ITS THEATRES AND PICTURES

Enthusiastic Concerning Sarah Bernhardt and Richepin's Translation of "Macbeth"—His Own Experiences as a Playwright.

Mr. Oscar Wilde is in Paris, on his wedding tour, "too happy to be interviewed," as he himself pleaded in a letter that would have melted any heart but that of a representative of THE MORNING NEWS. He was seen at the Hôtel Wagram, stretched on a sofa amid a heap of books, in a room overlooking the spacious Gardens of the Tuileries.

"You are reading, Mr. Wilde?"—not exactly a brilliant opening: but how to begin.

"Yes, I am dipping; I never read from the beginning, especially with novels. It is the only way to stimulate the curiosity that books, with their regular openings, always fail to rouse. Have you ever overheard a conversation in the street, caught the tag end of it, and wished you might know more? If you 'overhear' your books in that way, you will go back to the first chapter, and on to the last naturally, as soon as the characters 'bite.'"

"Huysmans and Stendhal are, I see, in your collection."

"Stendhal, of course," and Mr. Oscar Wilde held up "Le Rouge et le Noir" as some people hold up their Bibles. "As for Huysmans, this last book of his is one of the very best things I have seen."

"You go to Stendhal again and again?"

"Yes; and he is one of the few. For my part, I think the most exquisite thing in reading is the pleasure of forgetfulness. It is so nice to think there are some books you cared for so much at a certain epoch in your life and do not care for now. There is to me a positive delight in 'cutting' an author and feeling I have got beyond him."

"And do you extend that observation to persons?"

"Undoubtedly; so we all do only I would make it a positive satisfaction instead of a regret. Why should we not joyfully admit that there are some people we do not want to see again? It is not ingratitude; it is not indifference; they have simply given us all they have to give."

"You do not feel in that way about Paris, I suppose? You were here last year for a long time, and this season brings you here again."

"No; it is not easy to exhaust the message of Paris, especially when Sarah Bernhardt is playing."

"You have seen 'Macbeth'?"

"Over and over again; there is nothing like it on our stage, and it is her finest creation. I say her creation, deliberately, because to my mind it is utterly impertinent to talk of Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' or Shakespeare's 'Othello.' Shakespeare is only one of the parties; the second is the artiste through whose mind it passes. When the two together combine to give me an acceptable hero, that is all I ask. Shakespeare's intentions were his own secret; all we can form an opinion about is what is actually before us."

"And Sarah satisfies you?"

"There is absolutely nothing like her. She brings all her fine intelligence to the part, all her instinctive and acquired knowledge of the stage. Her influence over Macbeth's mind is just as much an influence of womanly charm as of will—with us they only accentuate the last. She holds him under a spell; he sins because he loves her; his ambition is quite a secondary motive. How can he help loving her? She binds him by every tie, even by the tie of coquetry. Look at her dress; the tight-fitting tunic and the statuesque folds of the robe below."

"The whole piece is admirably done. Richepin's translation is perfect in its way. He has put it into rude, majestic prose, the very language of the epoch, as one might conceive it—it is almost literal in parts. Intelligent minds have worked over the whole play in this French rendering. The very ghost is Elizabethan. Remember, in Shakespeare's day ghosts were not shadowy, subjective conceptions, but beings of flesh and blood, only beings living on the other side of the border of life, and now and then permitted to break bounds. The ghosts of the Porte-Saint-Martin are men; you could pinch them and run them through and through; they are not mere things of gauze, like our English stage figures of the kind, elaborated, apparently, from some programme of the Psychical Society."

"You have seen the 'Maitre de Forges'?"

"Not here; we have it in London, you know."

"And London is not 'shocked'?"

"Oh, London is improving; and besides it will take anything from the French. Of course, if an English writer had done anything of the sort, there would have been one loud shriek."

"So you might wish yourself a Frenchman—if you meant to go on writing plays?"

"In one respect, certainly; for the sake of the interpretation. What a gulf there is between the character as you conceive it and the character as it comes out on the stage. I admit, after what I said just now, that the author has no right to complain where the result is artistic; but with us that is so often not the case. I speak from experience: I shall never forget the two hours and a half I passed in the playhouse at New York on the first night of

my piece. It was the sharpest agony of my life."

"But you will write another play of course?"

"Undoubtedly; but just now I am laying myself out for a novel. Plays and novels, I think, ought to go together in a man's practice, if only to make one bear in mind what I consider the cardinal principle of all good style, that writing is something meant to be said aloud—to be spoken, in fact. With the multiplication of books we have got into the habit of merely writing for the eye, and that is fatal to all rhythm and music. Shakespeare's music came naturally from his habit of writing for the voice and the ear. I care little for archaism, for the nice choice of words of this or that epoch; please the mind through the ear—that is the all in all."

"You have seen the Salon?"

"Yes; I have seen the work of 'the trade,' matchless work a good deal of it; if you like but still that."

"And Sargent's portrait?"

"Oh, that is altogether on a higher level: like everything he does, it shows the influence of his fine nature and fine taste. Who but he would have ventured to outline that head as he has done, and yet you feel that was just the way to treat it. It is a pictorial reminiscence of the earlier grand art."

"Will he succeed in England, do you think? He is going to paint there."

"Beyond question. England is in a better condition to understand him than France. There is more individuality with us, less of that respect for tradition, good tradition though it be. Everybody there is a law unto himself. Even in such a thing as costume we revive the earlier styles or invent new ones, just because we think them good. He may treat his sitters according to his fancy; he will be sure to find people ready to judge him and them on their merits."

"So his Salon picture is the one righteous work that saves the city?"

"Not the one; you forget the Whistlers. Was anything more beautiful ever done than the portrait of the child—more tender and simple and finely true? It ought to be a revelation to the art world on this side."